

GEORGE JONES GOODMAN

(1904–1999)

A MEMOIR

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The University of Oklahoma and the State of Oklahoma lost their most distinguished and renowned plant taxonomist on May 23, 1999, with the death of Dr. George J. Goodman, Regents Professor Emeritus and Curator Emeritus of the Bebb Herbarium.

Dr. Goodman was born November 5, 1904, in Evanston, Wyoming, to Arthur and Elizabeth Jones Goodman. As a young girl his mother had come in 1886 to this country from Wales, and Dr. Goodman would proudly point out that half of him was a first-generation American. A ranch, located some twenty-five miles south of Evanston and homesteaded by his Grandfather Goodman in 1883, is where Dr. Goodman spent the first five years of his life. His love of the outdoors and the West thus began.

After graduating from Evanston High School in 1922, Dr. Goodman, who had no plans to attend college, worked as a ranch hand, as a clerk in a drug store, as a sacker in a grain elevator, as a salesman of pianos and phonographs and of contract printing, and as a compass man for the U.S. Forest Service in the Kaibab of Arizona. About 1925 and during the time he was delivering groceries in Ogden, Utah, Dr. Goodman's father bought another ranch which was located due south of Evanston a mile over the Utah line. Dr. Goodman went to that ranch in the spring of 1926, and very soon thereafter an event occurred that would begin his botanical career which lasted nearly three-quarters of a century!

Dr. Edwin Payson, a botany professor from the University of Wyoming who had done his graduate work on the Cruciferae at the Missouri Botanical Garden under Dr. Jesse M. Greenman, and his wife Lois came to Evanston to find someone to take them up into the Uintah Mountains to collect plants. It was there that they learned of George Goodman, who by that time had already climbed several peaks in the Uintah Mountains. They made their way to the Goodman Ranch and camped there for a week or two. Dr. Goodman took them up to Stillwater Fork and Hayden's Peak where Sereno Watson had collected in 1869 on the King Expedition.

Impressed by the young man who became their guide, the Paysons suggested to Dr. Goodman that he should go to college and offered to give him a room for the year and to try to find him a job on the Laramie campus. After a discussion with his parents, who decided a year of college couldn't hurt, Dr. Goodman agreed to go. While still camped at the Goodman Ranch, the Paysons wrote to Dr. Aven Nelson, botany professor and herbarium curator, and told him they had someone they thought would make a good

person to work in the herbarium mounting plants. Dr. Nelson wrote back, and when the Paysons told Dr. Goodman he had the job in the herbarium, he had no idea what an herbarium was. He didn't ask, but learn he did!

The Medicine Bow Mountains, located just to the west of Laramie, became a favorite collecting site during the three years and a summer Dr. Goodman spent obtaining his bachelor of arts degree with honors in botany. It was to these mountains that he would return many, many summers throughout his life. Whether he was there to teach at the University of Wyoming Science Camp or just to enjoy his cabin at 10,000 feet, he was in the mountains he loved.

In 1929 Dr. Goodman received a Rufus J. Lackland Fellowship from Washington University in St. Louis to do graduate work at the Missouri Botanical Garden under Dr. Jesse M. Greenman. His new roommate and soon-to-be closest friend was C. L. Hitchcock (Hitchy) who would become professor of botany and curator of the herbarium at the University of Washington, Seattle, and a major contributor to the *Flora of the Pacific Northwest*. Lured by *Eriogonum* and *Lycium*, Goodman and Hitchcock headed out to collect in the West in the summer of 1930.

This trip which began in June followed Route 66 through southern Missouri, Oklahoma, and the Texas panhandle. This was the first time Dr. Goodman had been in Oklahoma, and while no plants were collected until they reached Portales, New Mexico, on June 14, he remembered seeing in Oklahoma a curious, dicotyledonous plant with flowers that looked like an orchid. Three years later, after coming to the University of Oklahoma, he learned that he was looking at *Krameria*.

The Goodman/Hitchcock collecting trip was bountiful. Over five-thousand sheets were collected and later divided into sets which were then sold mostly to large herbaria throughout the country in order to finance the trip. Sites such as the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona and the Abajo Mountains of Utah had been infrequently collected. From their collections a few new taxa resulted.

Throughout their lives Hitchy continued to tease George Goodman about events which transpired during that summer in the field: At Mesa Verde Dr. Goodman expounded lengthily to two gentlemen on where to buy the cheapest gas in Monument Valley. One of the men proved to be the vice-president of Bethlehem Steel! Hitchy never did agree with Dr. Goodman on whether they had seen a mountain lion or a wolf in the Kaibab forests in northern Arizona. Nor could Hitchy believe that the herds of horses there were wild.

The two repaired in one day as many as fourteen blowouts on the tires of their panel truck, lived on strawberry jam, and had a lifetime's worth of fun. Even as late as 1992 Dr. Goodman clearly recounted for me the events of that trip.

Dr. Goodman completed his doctoral degree at Washington University and the Missouri Botanical Garden in 1933 and came once again to Oklahoma, but this time as an assistant professor of botany and curator of the herbarium at the University of Oklahoma, Norman. However, a job offer in 1936 from Iowa State College took Dr. Goodman to Ames.

During three of the summers in Iowa Dr. Goodman had the opportunity to return to the southwest to collect in the Lukachukai Mountains in the northeast corner of Arizona. He and Hitchy had seen these mountains in the distance as they drove north toward Mexican Hat, Utah. Very few botanists had by that time collected in the Lukachukai Mountains. Among those who accompanied him was Lois Payson, who had been instrumental in beginning Dr. Goodman's botanical career and who had been widowed in the spring of 1927. The group camped near Canyon de Chelly and collected on the Navajo Reservation. Lasting friendships developed with the wonderful Navajo. On one occasion at least they were invited to an Indian ceremony, which lasted the entire night. This association with the Navajo people made a lasting impression upon Dr. Goodman.

Fortunately for those of us who came later as students to the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Goodman accepted in 1945 the offer from Dr. George L. Cross, a former colleague and close friend in the OU Botany Department and by then president of the University of Oklahoma, to return to OU and the Bebb Herbarium. During his tenure as curator, Dr. Goodman built the collection from a few thousand plant specimens into one that before his retirement in 1975 would amass nearly a quarter-million specimens. Today the Bebb Herbarium houses the world's finest collection of the flora of Oklahoma, along with strong holdings of the flora from surrounding states, the southwestern United States, the Great Plains, and Mexico.

The University of Oklahoma recognized Dr. Goodman's exceptional contribution to the University and to the Bebb Herbarium by appointing him Regents Professor in 1967. He was also awarded the Distinguish Service Citation, the University's highest honor, in 1978.

Dr. Goodman possessed not only a lively intellectual curiosity and an exhaustive knowledge of plants, but also a warmth and cordiality that would make the herbarium a place where colleagues and students gathered over the years for meetings, parties, and informal coffee and conversation.

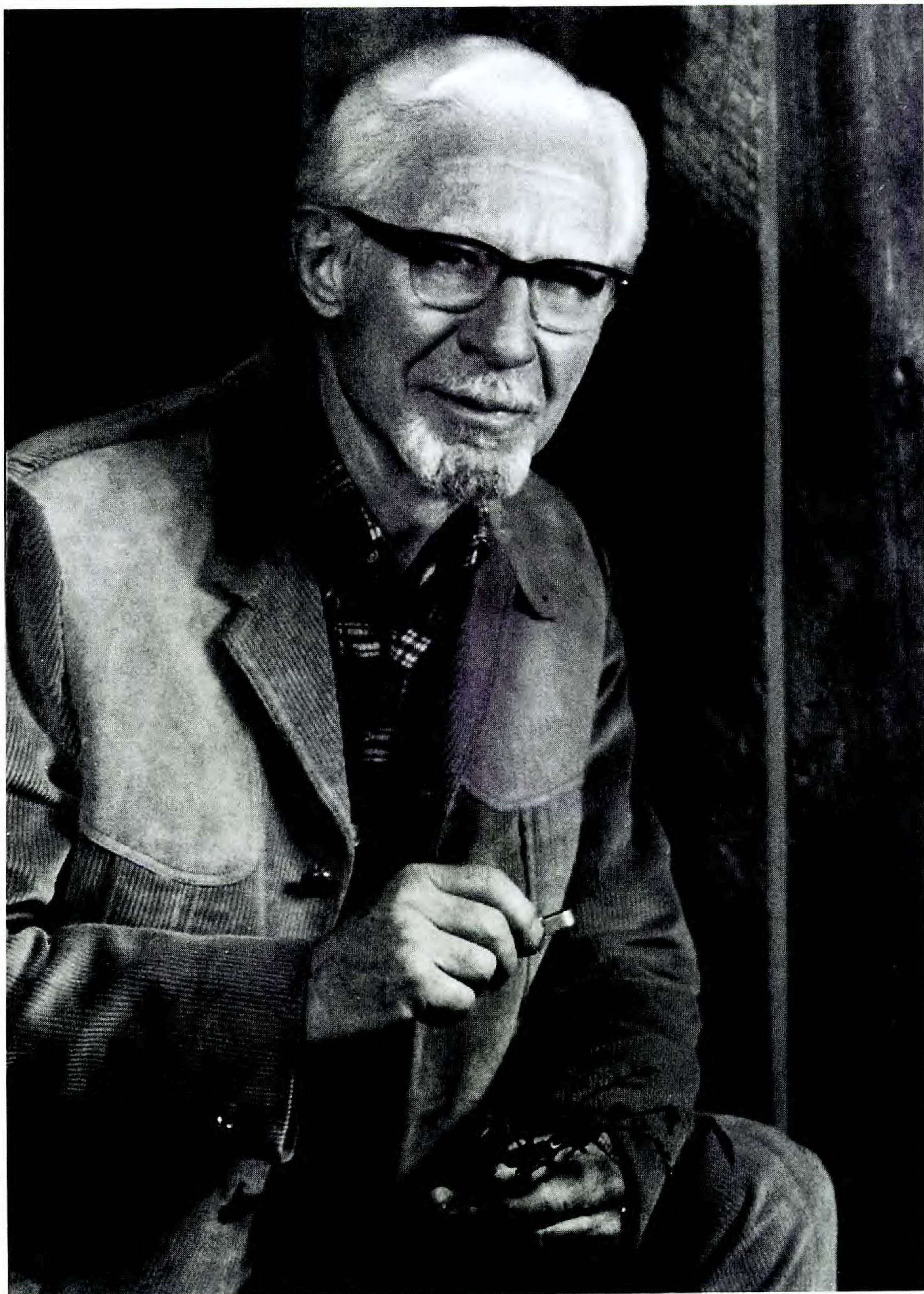
During his career as a botanist Dr. Goodman came to be known as a leading expert in the field of plant taxonomy for Oklahoma and the western United States. He authored seventy-three publications, described thirty-six new plant taxa, made eleven new combinations, and had four plants named for him.

Dr. Goodman was a charter member of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists, the International Association of Plant Taxonomists, the Society for the Study of Evolution, the Southwestern Association of Naturalists, and the Colorado-Wyoming Academy of Science. In addition, he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Sigma, Sigma Xi, and the Oklahoma Academy of Science. He received the Phi Sigma Ortenburger Award and the Oklahoma Academy of Science Award of Merit in addition to the Distinguished Service Citation from the University of Oklahoma.

I was Dr. Goodman's last graduate student. We continued to work side by side both in the field and in the herbarium for nearly a quarter century after his so-called "retirement." During the field work for our book, *Retracing Major Stephen H. Long's 1820 Expedition: The Itinerary and Botany* (OU Press, 1995), we traveled over 10,000 miles through



George J. Goodman among the junipers at the top of the hogbacks near the Chasm of the South Platte River, Douglas Co., Colorado, June 30, 1981.



George J. Goodman, spring, 1975.

Nebraska, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. Our field trips in the West following the route of this expedition were full of episodes which we recounted in our book. Working as I did with Dr. Goodman was an incredible experience filled with indelible memories.

Dr. Goodman was as enthusiastic about life as he was about plants. Once when asked how he would describe his life, Dr. Goodman replied, "It's been a blast!" It, too, was a "blast" for those of us lucky enough to have had him in a part of our lives!

In August, 1999, Dr. Goodman's ashes were taken by Marcia, his wife of fifty years, his daughter Sula Grace Henrichsen, and other relatives and friends to the vicinity of West Glacier Lake near Centennial, Wyoming, in the Medicine Bow Mountains. The circle closed, and he was back for perpetuity in the mountains he loved.